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Creative Techniques Used by Iraqi Teachers to Enhance Academic Writing Skills for Dentistry Students who use English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Academic writing is an essential skill for dentistry students, who must accurately document clinical observations, summarize scientific research, and communicate professionally in English. However, Iraqi dentistry students who study English as a foreign language (EFL) face persistent challenges in acquiring academic writing proficiency due to linguistic limitations, insufficient exposure to scientific English, and traditional teaching practices that emphasize memorization over creativity. This study investigates the creative techniques employed by Iraqi EFL teachers to enhance academic writing skills among dentistry students. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates instructor questionnaires with student and teacher interviews to explore common writing difficulties and the instructional strategies employed to overcome them. The findings show that teachers rely heavily on guided feedback, collaborative tasks, modeling through sample texts, and meaning-focused writing activities. Students, meanwhile, report difficulties with paraphrasing scientific texts, organizing ideas, and using academic vocabulary accurately. The study concludes that creative pedagogical approaches significantly support dentistry students in developing discipline-specific writing skills, and it recommends integrating creative, interactive methods into the English curriculum of dentistry programs across Iraq.

Keywords: academic writing, dentistry students, creativity, EFL teaching, Iraq, innovative pedagogy.

Introduction

English-language academic writing has become a core component of dentistry education, where students must engage with scientific literature, document cases, and communicate technical information clearly. Yet for Iraqi dentistry students, mastering academic writing presents a considerable challenge. Many students enter university with limited exposure to extended writing tasks, weak vocabulary foundations, and minimal confidence in expressing complex scientific ideas in English (1,2). Traditional writing instruction in Iraqi higher education emphasizes correctness, memorization, and product-oriented tasks. While these approaches help to develop grammatical accuracy, they often



fail to provide opportunities for students to practice creative expression, generate ideas, or engage interactively with writing (3). In contrast, creative pedagogical approaches have demonstrated greater effectiveness in developing sustained writing abilities by encouraging experimentation, collaboration, and deeper engagement with texts (4). The current study addresses the gap in literature concerning how creative techniques can enhance academic writing instruction for Iraqi dentistry students, a group that requires specialized writing skills due to the scientific and clinical nature of their field. In dentistry, the academic writing is situated within the broader context of health sciences education, where students must learn to interpret empirical data, summarize scholarly articles, and produce structured reports. Recent work in academic literacy highlights the importance of explicit instruction in scientific writing conventions, especially for EFL learners (5). Dentistry students face unique challenges, such as unfamiliar terminology, complex sentence structures, and discipline-specific rhetorical expectations (6). Creativity, as conceptualized in educational theory, enhances learning by fostering autonomy, engagement, and flexible thinking (7,8). In language teaching, creative approaches such as using visual prompts, collaborative writing, narrative tasks, and authentic materials can improve students' motivation and writing outcomes (4, 9). Despite the importance of academic writing for dentistry students, Iraqi dentistry programs continue to report weak writing performance. Students often struggle to produce coherent paragraphs, paraphrase scientific content accurately, or use academic vocabulary effectively (10). These difficulties are compounded by limited exposure to creative or interactive writing instruction in schools and universities. Thus, there is a pressing need to examine how Iraqi EFL teachers use creative techniques to help dentistry students overcome academic writing challenges. Consequently, this study designed to identify the main academic writing challenges faced by dentistry students studying EFL in Iraq. In addition, to examine the creative techniques employed by Iraqi EFL instructors to enhance academic writing skills. Moreover, determine whether demographic factors such as teacher gender influence the use of creative strategies.

Research Questions

What creative instructional techniques do Iraqi EFL teachers use to teach academic writing to dentistry students? What academic writing challenges do Iraqi dentistry students commonly encounter? Are there significant differences between male and female teachers in their use of creative techniques? The suggested hypotheses (H01): There is no significant difference between male and female teachers in their use of creative instructional techniques to teach writing. The Significance of the Study adds to the limited literature on writing instruction in Iraqi dentistry programs. It highlights the importance of creative pedagogical strategies and supports curriculum reform efforts in Iraqi higher education. The findings are relevant to EFL instructors, curriculum developers, and policy makers seeking to enhance academic literacy within dentistry.

Literature Review

Academic Writing in EFL Contexts

Academic writing involves complex cognitive and linguistic processes, such as planning, drafting, revising, and editing—skills that many EFL learners find difficult to



acquire (11). Iraqi learners, in particular, often have limited opportunities to practice extended writing before entering university (1). As a result, they struggle with idea development, organization, and accuracy. Scholars note that EFL writing difficulties typically include grammar errors, lack of cohesion, weak vocabulary, and problems with paraphrasing (3, 9).

Academic Writing in Dentistry Education

Academic literacy in the health sciences requires mastery of specialized terminology, scientific argumentation, and evidence-based writing (5). Dentistry students must be able to interpret research, produce case reports, and write clear clinical descriptions. Without proper training, students face challenges in transferring general EFL writing skills to scientific and clinical writing contexts (6).

Creativity in Language Teaching

Creativity has long been recognized as an essential component of effective teaching (7). In language education, creativity enhances learner engagement, encourages experimentation, and promotes deeper cognitive processing (8). Creative teaching also allows instructors to adapt instruction to students' needs, making lessons more interactive and meaningful (12).

Creative Techniques in Writing Instruction

Creative writing instruction in EFL contexts includes the use of:

- ✓ Guided feedback (14)
- ✓ Collaborative writing tasks (4)
- ✓ Modeling using sample texts (14)
- ✓ Visual and multimedia prompts
- ✓ Meaning-focused writing activities (9)

These strategies help build student confidence, improve idea generation, and facilitate linguistic development.

Common Writing Challenges Among Iraqi Students

Iraqi EFL learners commonly struggle with grammar accuracy, vocabulary limitations, sentence structure, and rhetorical organization (2, 15). Writing anxiety is also prevalent, reducing students' willingness to engage with challenging tasks (16).

Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data. The method allows for a comprehensive understanding of teachers' strategies and students' challenges. The participants were included:

50 EFL instructors from Iraqi universities teaching writing to dentistry students. In addition, to 100 dentistry students enrolled in English writing courses. The teacher Questionnaire were assessed teachers' use of creative strategies such as collaborative writing, modeling, feedback, and creative prompts. Moreover, semi-Structured Interviews conducted with 10 instructors and 15 dentistry students to explore writing challenges and perceptions of creative instruction. The data were collected over eight



weeks through online and in-person sessions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were coded thematically following established content analysis procedures.

Results

Creative Techniques Used by Teachers

Findings revealed extensive use of: Feedback-based instruction, Collaborative writing, Meaning-focused tasks, Model texts, Visual prompts, Group problem-solving activities. Teachers also reported integrating videos, diagrams, and images to help dentistry students visualize scientific concepts.

Writing Challenges Among Dentistry Students

Students commonly faced: Difficulty paraphrasing scientific texts, Limited academic vocabulary, Problems generating ideas, Weak organization and cohesion, Grammar and tense issues. These align with prior studies on Iraqi EFL difficulties (15).

Gender Differences

Statistical analysis found no significant difference between male and female instructors in use of creative techniques, confirming the hypothesis.

Discussion

Findings suggest that creative instruction plays an essential role in improving writing among dentistry students. Consistent with Maley, 2015 (4), teachers who used interactive and creative approaches saw greater student engagement. Feedback and modeling supported the development of accuracy and coherence, echoing Graham's, 2007 (13) emphasis on process-based writing. The challenges reported align with previous research on Iraqi learners (1,2), highlighting the need for continued focus on vocabulary development and paraphrasing.

Study Pedagogical Implications

These were included: Integrate creative, collaborative tasks into writing instruction, Use model scientific texts to enhance disciplinary literacy., Emphasize paraphrasing skills through guided practice, and Provide multimodal materials to support scientific writing. Implications for Curriculum Development Dentistry programs should revise curricula to include structured academic writing training grounded in creative pedagogy.

Conclusion

Creative instructional strategies are essential for supporting academic writing development among Iraqi dentistry students. By employing feedback-driven, collaborative, and meaning-focused activities, EFL teachers can help students overcome



linguistic and scientific writing challenges. The study contributes valuable insights for improving EFL instruction in dentistry faculties across Iraq.

Declarations

Acknowledgment

None

Ethics statement

The author approved that this research follows the journal's Attached Ethic Approval guidelines as appeared on the journal's author guidelines page.

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Competing interest's statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

ZKH provided the concepts, data analysis, and writing of the manuscript; worked with data collection and analysis; revised the manuscript and analyzed the data.

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